

words, they always win, but i know i'll lose by drippingcandie

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Summary:

“I know, I’m just saying that because like, it’s so obvious you’re not from here.”

“Why’s it so obvious, huh?” Will lets everyone congregate on the park benches before throwing himself down on the grass, preferring to have his own space. To his surprise, Richie plops down next to him.

“Your mom makes chicken and dumplings in July.” Will raises his eyebrows as if that’s supposed to prove anything. “You eat them over mashed potatoes. That’s a crime. A felony. A heinous act.”

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Author's Note:

- For [chaoticism](#).

this is for my great pal lo!!! they're the ones who got me into this ship and i was definitely excited to write them and i hope i didn't let yooou down

timeline wise, i decided to push the stranger things timeline up to line up with IT, mostly because i love imagining them being teenagers in the early nineties.

the title is from another love by tom odell!

besides that, i hope to be writing in this 'verse again soon and i love these boys very much.

Leaving Hawkins is something Will thought he would never have to do, but it's easier when he actually has to do it.

Jonathan has left for NYU and his mom wants to get away. Farther away from Lonnie and the Radio Shack and the Gate. Farther away from the memories that bog down their existence and make it harder to survive.

In a way, Will was mad.

Yes, they're leaving all the bad stuff, but there was good stuff about Hawkins, Indiana too. Even if no one could see it.

It's hard knowing that he'll never see Lucas again. Lucas, who

laughed when Will couldn't figure out how to tie up a damn bandana. Lucas, who had grabbed his wrist when he was putting his last quarters into Dragon's Lair. *It's not worth it, man. Wanna play some Dig Dug?* It'd be hard leaving Lucas.

And Dustin too. He'd never want to leave Dustin, who huffed at him when Will had told him that books simply were not called curiosity paddles and how he was never going to make it a thing. Dustin, who had once given him last pudding cup when Will had forgotten his packed lunch at home. *It's no big deal, Will. Take it.*

And there was always Mike.

Something in the back of his throat stung, and it felt like something was scraping under his skin as he thought about it. Mike Wheeler was something else. Yeah, he loved Lucas and Dustin. But he really loved Mike Wheelever. Loved with a capital L. Love written in graffiti across a brick wall. Love written in loopy words across the skyline.

And he knows Mike isn't gay, that isn't the issue. It's that he always has his hand out for Mike. Will was always waiting in the background for Mike to need him but he somehow never did. It was always the other way around.

Mike always wrapped an arm around him when things got too tough or held his hand when it began to shake and Will wanted it to be something so much more than platonic. But Mike had El and Mike was straight so Will knew it would never happen.

Will hated when he was right.

Mike didn't fall under the category of things that he didn't want to leave. Lucas, Dustin, late night Dungeons and Dragons campaigns, sleepovers, going down to the middle school to talk to Mr. Clarke, sitting in Jonathans old room and reminiscing of the first time he listened to the Clash, curling up in Castle Byers even though he had outgrown his childhood play place.

Mike fell in the list of bad things. The things that Will wouldn't mind leaving behind. The small shed in his backyard, being in the woods alone, the gaping hole in his living room wall. They hurt. And so did thinking about Mike.

It's not Mike's fault really. Mike would never hurt him on purpose.

But that doesn't mean Mike can't hurt him, and even though Will always has his hand out for Mike? Mike never needs it. He's used to. Oh he did need it at some points, but that's in the past.

It's in the past, Will thinks bitterly as he shoves his last bag into the trunk of the car.

"Will!" After he closes the trunk, he turns around to see Lucas's red truck pulling down his driveway and Dustin has his head sticking out the passenger side window. Both boys comes spilling out of the truck and running over to him.

He waits for Mike to come crawling out from the bucket seats in the back, but it doesn't happen.

“Where’s Mike?” He says when they get closer.

Lucas’s eyes flit back and forth from Will to Dustin and then back again. “Uh, said he had work. You know how it is.”

Will smiles a tight smile and he wants to say *No! No, I don’t know how it is. Because if MY best friend was packing up and driving to fucking Maine, I would find someone to cover my shift at my minimum wage Blockbuster summer. Because priorities.*

Instead he just says: “Oh, that’s okay.”

Dustin gives him a knowing look, but the whole thing passes quickly. “Dude, you’re going to have to write us, okay? Like some real updates and shit.”

Will has a feeling that if there were any books on Maine in the library, Dustin would already have his hands on them. If there was a way to get the town’s newspaper from oh so many miles away? Dustin would have all of the clippings. But there’s not, so Will will have to actually write letters.

He was planning on writing letters anyway and keeping all of his friends updated on his whereabouts. He had promised after all. However, he’ll probably have to pay for extra postage just to send weather, flora, and fauna updates to Dustin.

“You know I’ll write.” He says instead, and he’s pulled into a hug by the two of them. A true mess of limbs. Will knows he’ll miss this. Miss them, and he tries not to be a pessimist.

It’s not the end of the world, he tries to tell himself. He had always tried to convince himself that the Party would be friends for life, but he knows the truth. After graduation in two years, they all would have gone their separate ways anyway. And he would forget them, maybe not all at once, but slowly.

Staying in Hawkins was just making his mother miserable as he tried to prolong the inevitable Forgetting.

“Hawkins isn’t going to be the same without you, man.” Lucas says, and Will is sure that he feels hot tears hit his t shirt. He brushes it off and tells himself that it’s sweat from the hot July sun.

Hawkins isn’t going to be the same without him. He knows that Lucas is right and he knows that he won’t be the same without Hawkins, but he’ll be better. He’ll be a better Will for sure, because there will no longer be the constant reminded that there is something festering inside of him.

His mother breaks up their somewhat teary goodbye reluctantly by telling Will it’s time to go.

“Derry, Maine? Doesn’t sound too bad, does it Will?” She says as she climbs into the driver’s seat.

“No, mom.” Will says as they drive past the Blockbuster. “No it doesn’t.”

Derry is...different than Will was expecting.

It’s a lot like Hawkins, that’s for sure. It’s as if someone just picked up the haunted town from a cornfield and threw it down in the middle of a few animal pastures instead. There are the Ironworks instead of the Department of Energy, but Will thinks he prefers it that way.

Every other part of town seems to be the same. There aren’t many things that seem out of place. Derry has a main stretch with a library, a diner, and a pharmacy, which his mother had applied for a job at.

Will likes the fact that there’s an arcade the best.

He goes there by himself with his bag of quarters and gravitates towards Dig Dug. *Time to go beat that highscore, huh, Will?* He’s glad that he doesn’t see a Dragon’s Lair machine anywhere in the vicinity.

“Never seen *you* here before.” The voice comes from behind him and it’s almost accusing. Will watches as GAME OVER flashes in large letters across the screen before turning around to see who was talking to him.

He hopes it's not another Troy character. He can't deal with that, not only within one week of being here. He figured if everything about Derry was the same as Hawkins then there must be a set group of bullies all the same.

Except for this guy definitely can't be it.

No bully where's salmon shirts or matching Hawaiian printed shorts. His chucks obviously has worn soles and Will could see the guys hole ridden socks through the hole ridden shoes. His teeth gave the impression that they had once been buck, and the coke bottle glasses had a piece of tape holding them together.

Will figures it must've been a bully that broken them, so he feels the tension cease to exist in his shoulders. It's silly to think that he is sixteen years old and still worried about bullies.

The boy is still standing in front of him even after Will closes his mouth and opens it again, like a fish. The boy has got a nervous tick in his hand and he pushes his glasses up on his nose like he's the one who should be worried about his appearance.

"I've, uh." Will shuffles a bit and grabs for a few more quarters. It gives him the excuse to look down at his toes and avoid the boys plaintive looking eye contact if only for moment. "Never been." He finishes a little lamely.

"To the arcade? No wonder you're playing Dig Dug. Fucking game is so old school. Street Fighter is where it's at." So the guy has...opinions. Will could deal with opinions.

“Dig Dug is only five years older than Street Fighter.” Will says, shoving a quarter into the slot. The boy closes the large space that’s between them and now Will can see that this guy must be six feet tall at least, towering over him by four inches.

“That quite ‘a age gap there.” Will side eyes him as he speaks before pressing the start button. “Nothing compared to the one between me and your mom, though.”

“You don’t even know my name and you’re making jokes about my mother.” Will wrinkles his nose but doesn’t turn away from the screen. This guy had no manners and Will usually found that...disgusting. But the thought of someone not having a filter around him was nice. Different.

“Well, *my* name is-”

“Richie! Oh my god. Who the fuck are you harassing now?”

Will does turn at that, mostly because his interest in the game was dwindling by the second the longer this guy, whose name was apparently Richie, stood around.

Richie’s friend is short. Even shorter than Will which is a whole damn accomplishment, really. His fashion sense isn’t any more muted that Richie’s is, but it’s definitely a little more put together. His sneakers are pristine and his pink polo isn’t wrinkled.

He watches as the look on Richie's face softens a little bit. "Eds, I'm not harassing-"

Eds, apparently, throws his hands up to stop Richie mid sentence. "Bullshit. When are you not harass-"

"My name's Will." He blurts out, and the two boys standing in front of him aren't looking at each other anymore. "Byers." He tacks to the end.

"Will Byers, huh?" Richie doesn't even blink an eye when Will interrupts 'Eds'. "The new boy in town." He motions with both hands as if he's formally introducing Will to his friend. "New boy in town, this is Eddie Spaghetti-"

"Don't call me that, Richie. Jesus Christ, you know how I-"

"Hate that. Ayuh, everyone on this side of the Mississippi knows it. How 'bout you, William? What side are you from? Bet you could hear Eddie whining regardless." The softness that was on Richie's face is gone and is replaced with some sort of confidence that Will himself has never possessed in his whole life.

"Hawkins, Indiana." He notices that GAME OVER flashes across his screen again, being forgotten in the background. "And you don't have to call me Willia-"

“He’s going to anyway.” Eddie rolls his eyes and a shit eating grin is plastered across Richie’s face.

And Will knows he doesn’t have a mean bone in his body but he doesn’t think that he’s ever going to get a full sentence out around this Eddie guy. And he really wishes that he would stop interrupting him every time he tries to talk.

“We really have to go, Richie. We told Bill we’d be over and Ben and Mike are waiting for us at the library.” Eddie doesn’t pay Will anymore mind as he tries to tug Richie towards the door.

“Hey Byers!” Richie says, not even phased by the fact that Eddie has a hand wrapped up in his collar. “Park bench across from the pharmacy at noon tomorrow! See ya.”

Park bench across the pharmacy at noon tomorrow. Did he just get...invited?

He’s making friends faster than he did in kindergarten, that’s for sure.

Will meets all of Richie’s friends on the bench that next day.

There is Bill, who Richie fondly calls Big Bill, who seems to be fond

of button ups and baseball tees. He's got a mean stutter but it's clearing up, at least that's what he said. And everyone definitely agrees with him. He can tell by the look in everyone's eyes that they admire him, but Will isn't sure for what exactly.

Stan seems to always be sitting to his left. He's the one who doesn't look up to Bill with some sort of odd pride in his eyes. He's the outlier, Will supposes, and he reminds Will of an adult in a teenager's body. All pressed pants and upright posture. A kippah sits on a head of his curls, and of course Will only knows that because Richie tells him later. Will feels bad for not knowing but it's not his fault he's never seen anyone Jewish before.

Mike reminds Will of Dustin, all curiosity and bookwork. He wears muddied jeans and what looks to be a dusty t-shirt. Mike explains that he's homeschooled and he bikes a few miles to hang out with the rest of them everyday in the summer. He's got calluses on his hands and his smile is incredibly warm.

Ben is bookish too, and him and Mike seem to know more about Derry than anyone would ever want to know. He ignores how something goes unspoken between all of them when he brings up the history and research he's collected so far. He's wearing a sweatshirt in July and Will wonders why.

Bev is fiery, much like Max, but in her own way he supposed. Richie describes her as a badass bitch and Will snorts, but Richie looks at him as if doesn't want to actually test that theory. She wears olive overalls and freckles smatter her face. She steals a smoke from Richie before asking Will if it's alright if she lights it, which is more than Richie did, so Will decides he likes her.

Eddie doesn't interrupt as much when they're all together as a group. He seems to stick to Bill's other side quite closely. Richie leans over and mumbles about how Eddie is so far up Bill's as that it'd take all six of them and maybe a few more just to get him out.

And Richie. Richie latches on to him like some kind of leech, but Will doesn't mind. Richie doesn't touch him like he's going to break and there's no filter in place for Richie's words, so Will lets him. Like they had been friends for years. Like he wasn't just some random boy that he had met in the arcade yesterday.

The groups had just finished their junior year of highschool and Will's heart hammers in his chest. They're going into senior year and Richie had already started teasing Ben for going into "architecture or some shit". *You know it's architecture Trashmouth, don't pretend that you don't care.*

Will's a year younger, well the same age as Stan, and they'll all be leaving him only a year from now.

His anxiety is bubbling for no reason he supposes. Who says that they will even want to hang out with him once summer is over? Will has never been a social butterfly. Will has never really had anyone but Lucas, Dustin, and *Mike* .

They laugh and joke in the summer sun. Will seems to fall into tandem with them somehow, and he wonders how such a close knit group of friends let him in so easily. Losers, that's what they had called themselves.

They're the only thing in this town that can distract Will from this festering under his skin and the festering he feels below the streets.

Richie is lying on Will's bed a week later.

His lanky legs are hanging over one side while his head is hanging over the other. He has a comic book in his hand but Will is pretty sure he's reading it upside down.

Will is sitting at his desk and attempting to write a letter, but it seems very lackluster. The trashbin next to him is filled with more scrapped drafts than imaginable. It turns out that trying to find the balance between sounding too excited and not excited enough is hard. And everytime he rereads, he realizes he's written a half page about Derry's local trashmouth.

"What are these friends of yours like anyway, sweetcheeks?"

Will swivels around in his chair and tries not to blush.

If there is one thing that Will has learned over this past week is that Richie is very liberal with nicknames. He throws them around however he wants to. And it never fails to make Will blush.

"They're...okay." Will says, albeit slowly. "What most friends are like. What your friends are like." He adds, turning back to start with

something a little more manageable, Dustin's Derry curiosity update.

He manages to write a few pages about Stan's bird book and the phenomenon that's the Northeast United States, relatively cool summers. Indiana is flat and hot and everything is soaked up by the summer sun, but Maine? The other day Will had almost thought he would need a jacket.

"Just okay?" Richie rolls over on his stomach and sets down his comic book.

"More than okay." Will amends. "They just treat me like I'm a kid is all."

"But you are." Richie says, but something flashes across his face like he knew it was the wrong thing to say. "But you're also very manly if I do say so myself. Handsome, even."

Here's the thing about Richie, Will thinks. At first he thought that there was no filter. All of his thoughts just went from brain to mouth, but as Richie got increasingly flirty, he was sure that all of it was for show. That none of it really meant anything. For some reason, Will wanted there to be some truth behind the words. For some boy to finally be interested in him. He had spent his whole life in a small town of people who didn't understand.

He wishes Richie felt like that too, so Richie could understand him.

But Richie just likes putting on a good show and Will was a little bit bitter about the whole ordeal.

“Thanks Richie,” He says softly, turning back to his letter and finishing up his thoughts on the quarry that the gang had brought him to three days ago. He signs his name and puts down his phone number, telling them that they can call once a month. Long distance was expensive, but his mom had set him aside a few minutes.

“No problem, William.” Richie sits up on Will’s gingham sheets and rumples his dark blue comforter. “All I’m saying is that you must care about them a lot. What were their names?”

“Lucas, Dustin, and Mike.” Will folds up his letter and pulls an envelope out of the box. “We were the party, you know? Like a Dungeons and Dragons thing.” He had never been good at folding paper or getting the damn letters to fit.

Richie sees his frustration and rolls ungracefully off of the bed to assist him. “So a rightful nerd then?” He grins and unfolds the letter, undoing the creases that Will had made to the best of his ability. His long fingers seem to move methodically now that they have something to do besides twitch. “Like wizards and shit.”

“I guess so.” Will hums. “I was the cleric.” Richie isn’t pretending to be interested, he truly is, and Will can tell because his brow is furrowed in confusion. “Kinda like a priest, and they can use magic.”

Richie is practically leaning over him now while he sits at the desk, and Will can feel the heat radiating off of him. Richie was like a

human space heater while Will ran incredibly cold, which they had found out earlier in the week when Will touched Richie with his feet on accident. *What the fuck! Did you dip your toes in ice water? Take a cold shower lately?*

Richie's breath is fanning his face and Will leans in as if to whisper a secret, say something, do anything, and it looks like Richie is leaning in to and there's some tension in the air that Will can't quite place, but then-

"Will, dinner's do --Oh! Hello, Richie, didn't know you were here." Will's mother is standing in the walkway to his room and Richie jumps back like he touched a stovetop. "Joining us for dinner? I got takeout from that little Chinese restaurant down the street."

"Yeah, Mrs. B." Will gives him a pointed look. "Mrs. Byers. I'd love that. Thank you."

Mrs. Byers teeters down the hallway and Will can swear he hears her muttering something about how her son always manages to pick the ones with manners.

Richie? With manners? If only she knew.

"You sound like you're from Indiana." Richie muses one day when the whole gang is getting ice cream.

Richie ordered Will's for him like he couldn't do it himself, but Will really didn't mind. Richie wasn't babying him, it was just how he showed that he cared. That's what Will is guessing anyway because Richie turns to Eddie and says he's going to have to order his own for once. *You always fuck it up anyway, Trashmouth.*

"I am from Indiana." Will says, eyebrows scrunched as he takes the vanilla cone from Richie.

"I know, I'm just saying that because like, it's so obvious you're not from here."

"Why's it so obvious, huh?" Will lets everyone congregate on the park benches before throwing himself down on the grass, preferring to have his own space. To his surprise, Richie plops down next to him.

"Your mom makes chicken and dumplings in July." Will raises his eyebrows as if that's supposed to prove anything. "You eat them over mashed potatoes. That's a crime. A felony. A heinous act."

"Didn't know you knew words that big, 'Chee." Eddie says as he licks at his strawberry cone. Richie shoots him a look and he goes right back to what he was doing before; talking to Bill.

"You weren't complaining when you were eating it, Richie." Will folds up his legs and relishes in the feeling of the freshly cut grass that itches at his skin. The sun isn't as bright today, but it still feels like summer and being carefree.

Bev creeps into their conversation somehow. “Isn’t that like the third time this week, Richie?” She’s got her legs draped over the armrest and her head in Ben’s lap.

“What Will and I do is no one else’s business.” Richie says a little stiffly, and Will finds himself going red for no goddamn reason. They don’t do anything.

Richie has been coming over to his house every other day for what Will wants to say, actually he knows, has been the past two weeks. July is soon to come to an end, but Richie still sits in his room all the same. His mom doesn’t mind, Richie actually sits quietly, and if he’s lucky, he’ll sit still enough for him to draw.

They don’t talk about the almost-kiss or refer to it as an almost-kiss because Will is pretty sure that he is the only one out of the two of them that thought of it as such.

“Isn’t that right, Willy?” And he had adopted a new nickname.

“What?”

“I was just talking about your mom-”

“No, you weren’t.” Will says unbothered, catching a bit of ice cream that was melting down the side of his cone. “If you ever did, she

might stop feeding you.”

“Ayuh, don’t you practically live there now?” Stan pipes up, adjusting his kippah. Stan didn’t get ice cream, Will had discovered, because he was not a huge fan of sweets.

“Okay, Stan the Man, I know your mom loves this dick but you can hop right on off.” Richie adjusts the position he is sitting in and his ankle brushes up against Will’s thigh and stays there. Will enjoys the proximity.

Richie isn’t lying on his bed this time, but instead is lying on his floor.

“Why’s your mom so protective, William?”

Will thinks that the tip of his pencil almost snaps from the pressure he’s putting against it. “You wouldn’t believe me.” Will snuffs, going back to shading, but this time with more purpose.

“Oh, why wouldn’t I? Ya would never lie to me now.” Richie seems to be joking, but he catches the somber look on Will’s face and he mirrors it rather quickly. “You don’t have to tell me. Just was curious.”

Will smiles, although it's melancholic. "I want to, but you wouldn't believe me." Will repeats. He wants to tell Richie-

"Was it some supernatural shit?" Richie piques up from his spot on the shag rug. He contorts his body in a far more complicated shape in an attempt to sit up.

Will could tell him that it was supernatural he supposes, but it wasn't. It was...real. Science and shit. Something that was still out there and probably looking for something else to possess.

"Like that, I guess." Will rubs at his nose.

Richie seems to sit on a thought if only for a moment, biting the pad of his thumb and twirling the string of his hoodie between the fingertips of his other hand.

"I went missing." Will says, not looking up from his sketchbook. "And, uh," His eyes flit from the page to look back and forth at the wall. "They found me dead, but it wasn't." He wipes one of his palms against his jean shorts. "It looked like me but it was full of stuffing."

Richie is silent. Will wants some sort of reaction.

"They showed my mom, but she knew I was still out there." He doesn't really specify where there is, doesn't mention the Upside

Down because it takes a lot more explaining than he's willing to do for someone who may just ditch him in a few weeks when summer is over. He knows Richie wouldn't do that, but he could, and putting all his baggage on the table is pretty risky.

"And then I was possessed." He doesn't mean to say it, really, because how else was he supposed to explain it. "Almost died again." He doesn't mean to say it like it's not a big deal, really. He knows he's saying it like he just coasted on through it.

Richie mulls over his confession for a bit, but he doesn't laugh. Or call him crazy. Or a liar. Or compare him to a zombie.

"You're telling me you escaped death twice?" Richie raises his eyebrows quizzically. Will looks up again and gives him a sheepish nod. "That's so fucking cool, Byers. You shudda told me sooner."

"Not many people think it's cool." Will said. "It just makes them worry."

"Nah, no need to worry when you do something as badass as that." Richie picks himself up from the ground and dusts off his god awful shorts. He's wearing socks that come up way too high and a different pair of worn down shoes than from the first time Will met him, and he can only tell because he's looking down at the floor.

Richie seems to pause for a second and he bites his lips, as if he doesn't know what to say next.

“I believe you, Will.” He says with sincerity. It’s the first person he’s told outside of Hawkins about the whole ordeal, even though he didn’t tell the full truth. Didn’t tell him about the government or the demogorgons or how Mike had discovered he was some kind of evil spy. Evil.

It didn’t matter, because Richie believed Will.

Will believed Richie.

“That’s the ugliest thing I’ve ever seen.”

Will and Richie were currently standing in the second hand shop, the only thrift shop to sit within the Derry town lines. Will had always wondered where Richie had received the pieces of his somewhat interesting style.

The word interesting really didn’t cover him. Richie’s mismatched socks that showed when he rolled up his unevenly hemmed jeans. He wore too many layers that ended up on opposite spectrums of the color wheel.

This jacket was something else.

It was olive with those square studs that Will has never really been a fan of. He sees the belts and the jean pockets and the boots that are decorated with them and cringes, but there's nothing worse than it in the stark contrast to the muddy green. It's obvious it's been passed down a bit or someone's done some work on it, because it's covered in hand embroidered patches.

The patches weren't the worst part because right where the breast pocket would be, there are windows. Clear pieces of plastic that showed the Hawaiian shirt Richie was wearing underneath.

Richie holds his hand over his heart, acting as if Will had just shot him in the chest. "Oh, Willard! Willard, you wound me!" He drops to his knees right there on the tattered carpet.

Will does a quick glance around the store. The old man that's wheezing in his seat by the register doesn't even look up from his crossword puzzle and the old lady sifting through sweaters only glances at them for a moment.

"Stop making a scene, Richie." Will hisses even though there was no malice.

"But *Wiiiiiiiii* ." He says from his new place on the ugly carpet, which has probably never been replaced. "I love making a scene."

Will can't help it when he lets out a laugh, an airy one that kind of sounds like the bells above the thrift shop door. "I know you do." He rolls his eyes.

“Don’t pretend I haven’t seen that puff vest in your closet, Byers. That’s horrendous.” Will chuffs and helps Richie off the floor, who seems to be trying to make this as hard as possible for the both of them. He eventually makes it to his feet though.

The other boy crowds his space, even if it’s not on purpose. He towers over Will on any given day, but the monstrstrosities on Richie’s feet give him an unusual added inch of height.

“Do you really think it’s ugly?” Richie’s looking down at him and speaking quietly, dark hair falling in his face just so.

Richie is far too close to him. Will tries not to think the butterflies that have sort of erupted in his stomach over these past few weeks. They don’t remind him of the painful tummy turns he had with Mike, in fact that’s all he could remember about Mike really. Derry had a way of making you forget.

“I think it makes you look dashing.” Will jokes, grabbing on to the collar of the jacket and putting some distance between the two of them.

Richie snaps back like elastic.

“Dashing?” Richie raises his eyebrows. “*Aren’t you quite the charma?*” He speaks again in one of the most ridiculous accents Will has ever heard. Will’s heart catches in his throat again and he knows he has that silly smile on his face and-

“Boys?” Will hops back as the little old lady comes towards them, no longer sifting through sweaters. “You’re standing in front of the novellas.”

And Will looks behind him to see that there is a bookshelf full of what looks to be tattered books behind them. All the pages look yellow with age and he can’t dream of reading one himself, unless it was a particularly interesting comic book, but he steps out of the way and pulls Richie with him.

“Sorry ‘bout that Mrs. J!” Richie says as he shrugs off the ugly jacket and gets out of the way. He gives him that look that says *I’m totally buying this*.

Will supposes he gets the appeal of finding clothes at a thrift store. Richie’s wardrobe wouldn’t look like his without the purposely weathered clothing, but Will often struggles to ever find something himself. Richie tries to encourage him, pushing him towards the overalls and sweaters and other things that people would call queer.

And it’s not that Will doesn’t like them, he does. But he’s always had to shop at the thrift store out of necessity (and sometimes even steal things from Jonathan’s clothes that were packed up in the attic). He doesn’t think shopping here is fun.

But when Richie counts the bills out of his wallet to hand to the cashier, proudly holding his new purchase, Will thinks it’s delightful.

When they walk out, Richie slings the far too big jacket over the expanse of Will’s shoulders, It hangs over his thighs and Richie

doesn't even bother letting him put his arms through the sleeves.

Will doesn't complain about the summer heat once.

"We fought a demon clown."

The words tumble from Richie's mouth when Will least expects it. He had been sitting for quite some time and was being still while Will had sketched his outline. His hands had been fidgety though and Will had been chastising him for fiddling with his glasses.

Will does a double take, trying to process this new information. The pencil in his hand is tucked into the sketchbook's spiral binding.

"A demon clown?" He just wants to make sure that he heard Richie correctly. A demon clown.

"You don't have to believe me." There's anxiety setting in Richie's voice, heck, he can practically feel the tensions within Richie as he sits only a few feet away from him at the foot of the bed. "The others are forgetting and-"

"The others?" Will says and Richie goes to rub at his nose idly. Will sets down his sketchbook next to him and readjusts himself on the

mattress. He leans in a bit, not even having to feign interest.

“The losers,” Richie mutters. “It’s stupid. I’m not even sure if IT was really a clown. IT shifted, and it was fucking terrifying.”

And Will has never seen a shapeshifter before. He’s seen things shift though. Dart starting as what appeared to be a small house pet shifting into a demodog. He saw himself shift into something empty, cryptic, and inhuman.

“We’ve never told anyone before,” And Richie Tozier actually sounded plaintive, like a child, almost. Will set a small hand on his knee. “No one would believe us. It got Bill’s brother. Almost got Stan.”

He thinks of Stan and tries to think about anything that’s off about him. It’s not as if he knew the boy from before whenever this occurred, but nothing seems to be wrong. He’s peculiar and a little particular, but so are other boys.

“They don’t remember and I’m starting to think,” Richie’s voice cracks tremendously and it’s odd to see. There’s this boy who Will sees the world in, really, the whole world. He’s strong and confident and just him being in the room commands attention. “That the others wouldn’t believe me either.”

It’s in that moment that Will doesn’t see the world inside Richie, but rather the world is sitting on Richie’s back. Crushing him.

“I believe you.”

Richie’s head snaps up in what appears to be disbelief when Will says it. His mouth is a little agape and his eyes look a little lost as he straightens his posture. As if to say *really? You believe me! Someone finally!*

Richie grins only a millisecond before it happens.

Will had leaned forward in the moment really, the look on Richie’s face a little too perfect. It was just a brush of lips, but it was Will’s first kiss. A slight brush of the lips with Richie Tozier. And when he feels Richie goes tense beneath him the feeling is ruined.

Maybe he had read this whole summer all wrong, this whole situation all wrong. Richie was just his new best friend it seemed, always attached at the hip. It was stupid to think that Richie got the same butterflies in his stomach that Will got. Stupid, stupid-

Lips were on his in a real kiss this time. At least, Will would classify it as a real kiss. Richie’s lips are sealed against his, pressed together and chapped (how his lips are chapped in August, Will has no fucking clue).

When Richie pulls away, Will almost protests. “Never thought you’d make the first move, William.” There’s tears glistening in his eyes like they’re just about to fall, and he sniffs a bit like he’s about to sob, but nothing like that ever comes. Instead, it’s an honest to God sincere smile ghosting on Richie’s features.

And there's not a time in a thousand years where Will would disagree with him. Will never made the first move, it wasn't in his nature.

Richie's friends are forgetting about their own town while they're in it, Will thinks a little sorrowfully. And Richie is stuck. Will was stuck at one point in Hawkins, Indiana. The only solution was to leave.

A little bit of panic rises up in Will's chest because yeah, Richie could do that. Richie could leave. But then he's looking at Richie who is looking at him like he hung the moon or some equally sappy nonsense that El would probably watch in her soap operas. And he kind of loves Richie Tozier. A lot.

Kind of is an understatement.

"Never thought you'd make the first move either, Richard."

"*Ooooooh* , Wily gets off a good one." Richie says, and for some reason the atmosphere doesn't shift or falter. Will scrunches his nose a bit and gently shoves Richie's shoulder.

And kisses him square on the mouth again.

Author's Note:

you can find me on twitter @willwheelcr !